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50 Years of Service

University of Dayton

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NEWS

Friday May 29, 2015

50 Years of Service

We're celebrating a milestone for the University of Dayton Summer Appalachia Program, our longest-standing service program. For a half-century, our students have spent summers among the people of Salyersville, Kentucky. They live simply and learn more than they ever could imagine.

Salyersville is a tiny Appalachian community, just 227 miles from campus but worlds apart in way of life.

The program started in the midst of the War on Poverty in 1964, when a priest spoke to UD students about the poor of Appalachia. In a decision characteristic of Flyers, they resolved to act. The students organized a "Give your heart to Appalachia" week to raise awareness about difficulties in the area and began to make weekend trips to eastern Kentucky.

Alan Papszun '68 was one of first UD students to begin working in eastern Kentucky. He remembered: "This extremely rich, informative, life changing experience put me on a path of social activism, continuing to today, for which I am deeply grateful."

While in Salyersville, they live without cellphones, indoor plumbing or television. That lifestyle allows the students to focus on the people and learn the true meaning of "community." Mark Motz '10 said, "UDSAP taught me two things, two of the most important things anyone could learn — how to be, and how to be in a community. In a place where possessions mean nothing and people mean everything, it is easy to see people for who they are, not what they are."

This is the focus of UDSAP, not to "save" the people of Salyersville, but to learn, live in community, and

be changed by the experience, according to Brother Tom Pieper, S.M.

This year's group departed campus in May with vanloads of donated food and clothing, joining a long line of our students who have felt called to the program and found their lives changed forever.

Along with Pieper, the students headed off to spend nine weeks in Salyersville surrounded by well-wishers from the campus community and ready to begin their summer experience. Prayers from program organizers and alumni accompanied the group as they began the three and a half hour drive. Their summer will be spent running a day camp and a teen center and volunteering at a local nursing home. In the evenings, the students will visit with families in the community.

To many program alumni, the family visits are the most important part of the program. Senior Jack Schleuter agreed: "The families are everything; it's what this is all about."

Celebrations for the 50th anniversary will begin on Reunion Weekend. UDSAP alumni are invited to reconnect with friends and meet other generations of alumni 1-4 p.m. June 13, in Torch Lounge. Past program advisors Brother Don Smith, Sister Nancy Bramlage, and Pieper will give a presentation featuring a new video highlighting UDSAP.

For a window into their experience, visit this story about the 2013 group: [Where the Walls Talk](#).